



Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council

DATE: Tuesday, September 12, 2017

TIME: 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

PLACE: Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow MT

Region 6 CAC members present: Damien Austin, Mark Azure, Scott Azure, Jay Crandell, Ken Forbregd, Ron Garwood, Perri Jacobs, Dirk Monson, Brian Olson, Tyler Tarum, and new members Kelly Jones, and Aaron Wittmer.

Region 6 CAC members not present: None.

FWP members present: Mark Sullivan, Marc Kloker, Scott Thompson, Tim Potter, Steve Dalbey, Ryan Linder, Cody Nagel, Ron Howell, Kathy Smith.

Guests attending the meeting: Senator Mike Lang, Commissioner Rich Stuker, Commissioner Logan Brower, Darlyne Dasher (Upland Game Bird Council), Don Kaveshan (Walleye spawn and survey), and Shay Piedalue (FWS).

Handouts provided: Agenda, R6 CAC list, Charter, Fire Restriction Stages, Fire Restriction Definitions, Fire Coordination Conference Call Notes (8-30-17), proposed changes to dog training rules, New BM Landowner acres, BMA's closed or significantly restricted list, minutes of last meeting, travel forms.

Welcome; review of agenda; Introduction of CAC members and FWP staff, guests (How is the current drought affecting you?) - Marc Kloker and Mark Sullivan

Review of CAC charter - Mark Sullivan

Main points of CAC charter covered for the benefit of new and existing members.

Follow up and review of action items from June CAC Fieldtrip-as assigned

Concerns about AIS and the Fresno area - Will be discussed at a meeting to be arranged with Tom Woolf, FWP Aquatic Invasive Species Bureau Chief; Steve Dalbey, FWP Regional Fisheries Manager; Cody Nagel, FWP Havre Area Fisheries Biologist; Brian Olsen, Fresno Chapter of Walleyes Unlimited and interested anglers from Tiber/Fresno Reservoirs after the season.

O'Juel Reservoir Road signage - Following concerns voiced by CAC member Tyler Tarum at the spring CAC meeting, the sign to O'Juel reservoir was moved farther west on the County Road to the turn off to O'Juel Reservoir. This move was completed to reduce confusion about access to the county road past O'Juel Reservoir.

Nelson Reservoir Signing – Dave Fuller will work with reps from the Malta Chapter of Walleyes Unlimited to develop and erect signage directing anglers using the newly extended North Ramp to park across the county road in the newly developed parking lot adjacent to the ramp.

Working with Ft. Belknap Tribes on pearl dace conservation - Allison Stringer (MSU grad student) presented pearl dace population status updates at the meeting with the Ft Belknap Tribe on 7/18. FWP will work with USFWS liaison and tribal staff to assist in sampling waters on Ft. Belknap as a broader sampling effort that is planned in 2018.

Issues regarding St. Mary's - Will be addressed later today

Fire update- Mark Sullivan and Marc Kloker

Mark hoped for rain the 1st half of summer and gave up in the 2nd half.

- FWP closely monitors the situation by participating in weekly fire calls with County Commissioners, DNRC, USFWS, COE, FS and the BLM. FWP follows the county restrictions on Fishing Access Sites and Wildlife Management Areas. FWP also conducts weekly internal fire calls between the Regions and Helena to follow fire situations statewide closely.
- There have been many questions about closing the hunting season. Last time the hunting season was closed was briefly in 1988. This year the Department will work with landowners and land agencies who will make the call regarding closing their lands, rather than an overall hunting season closure. That way hunters are not penalized when land is still open to other types of use and recreation and also because the fire situation is variable across the state.
- Marc, who has a background of firefighting, discussed weekly fire calls, fire stages, FWP policies and BM closures as well as a list of county fire stages. FWP is the liaison for fire information.

Perry Jacobs—How do we reach the out of state hunters with the information? Can we collect their email addresses?

Marc - Many hunters use the web site and face book and the office gets many calls from hunters already knowing about the drought and fire situation. (We can collect emails when we enter or update hunter's information).

We currently have many email addresses. Hunters are typically good stewards of the land. No private landowner must allow hunting.

Action Item: Marc- will check into news releases to other states.

Fisheries update-drought, drawdowns, AIS - Steve Dalbey, Cody Nagel

Steve began the update by presenting a map and a brief description of the size and condition of the Milk and the Milk-St Mary System operated by the Bureau of Reclamation with irrigators bearing the cost.

Drought impacts on Milk River Reservoirs - Cody Nagel

The only water coming into MT the later part of June and July was from Lake Sherburne. On Aug 11th the irrigation activity was shut down. Fresno has come up 12 ft. and should come up an additional 3-4 ft. before winter. Cody also discussed;

- The effects of drought on Fresno - it's water levels, it's fish populations and habitat, and angling pressure.
- Nelson Reservoir - its pool elevations, young of year trends, resiliency, angler pressure. – not drawn down as much as projected this year.
- Low water benefits - vegetation growth, repairing and improvement of infrastructure, projects such as the Nelson ramp extension, Fresno ramp maintenance and clean the beach work parties.
- Other observations -increased aquatic vegetation growth, increased presence of blue-green algae blooms, perennial streams were reduced to intermittent pools.

Milk-St Mary issues – Steve Dalbey

- Very complicated project because of all the parts involved, including the aging infrastructure, the water supply, the boundary water treaty with Canada, Indian reserved water rights, threatened and endangered species and sedimentation and loss of storage.
- Can recreationalists and/or Threatened and Endangered Species (pallid sturgeon) be a partner in the restoration of the project?
- At a minimum, FWP Fisheries is very interested in working with partners to explore options for fish passage at Vandalia Dam. This would open up approximately 150 miles of the Milk River to the 40+fish species that depend on the Milk.
- FWP cares about the Milk-St Mary because it is critical to the agricultural values of the Hi-Line and associated communities as well as to the fish and wildlife and associated recreational values. In a 2006 study completed by Dr. Duffield (U of M) indicated that recreational values of the Milk-St Mary is between \$6-\$12 million dollars annually.
- Conservation interests hold many shared values with the agriculture community in seeing a viable Milk-St Mary System.

Marc – What does the infrastructure include?

Everything in the infrastructure is outdated. (Mike Lang).

Not getting the CFS any longer that it probably was originally capable of. (Cody Nagel).

Ron Garwood – Is there fish passage at Vandalia Dam? Most years, no. (Steve Dalbey).

Mike Lang spoke about the equation for the water use between Canada and the US.

Steve would like to keep the issue in front of the CAC as it is a common and critical thread to the Hi-Line.

Wildlife Update- block management, season setting, sage grouse- Scott Thompson, Tim Potter

Block Management

- Tim Potter shared the successful enrollment process with over 76,000 new acres added, 36,000 acres lost for a gain of over 40,000 acres this year. Total acres in R6 BM is over 1.3 million acres. One more technician was added this year.
- *Shay* asked what kind of authority the techs have? They can only check hunters for permission in BM and for licenses within BM and they work closely with the wardens.
- Some BMA's were closed or significantly restricted due to the fire danger. Closing BM's can be done quite quickly and gets posted to the web and signs up right away. Fire closures are a high priority for us.
- Scott Thompson emphasized the team approach that gets the BM contract done. R6 has the most BMs in the State. Growing the properties sometimes happens by word of mouth and FWP connections with the public.

Season Setting process

Scott explained that the season settings require Recommendations to the Commission and the Commission approves what goes out for public comment and eventually makes final decisions.

- Upcoming Proposals may include bringing back limited mule deer does in 600,611,621,622 and 652. Also in addition to the single region whitetail, looking to reinstate a 2nd whitetail doe with a quota that would allow FWP to respond to growing whitetail populations.
- May recommend eliminating the disabled deer permit for 630 as they already can be hunting there with the general license.
- Looking to increase harvest of Elk to reduce the population. Weighing effectiveness of current shoulder season. Not as successful as we would have liked. Should it be longer? Looking at expanding.
- *Mike Lang* questioned limiting the hunt to off the CMR. Scott explained it is an effort to put the hunters where the animal conflicts with landowners exist.
- *Rich Stuker* asked what we would be looking for in the next biennium after our current shoulder season expires. Rich wants to be sure that we don't wind up with a year when we don't do anything. Scott indicated that the recommendation would be for 2018 and 2019 but would depend on whether the shoulder season met the harvest criteria following 2018.
- *Aaron* asked if we had looked at starting it sooner. Hunting early would push them into their private sanctuaries and decrease the opportunities for archery hunters. Scott discussed the recommendation of the Breaks Elk Working Group to not start the shoulder season before the archery season due to concerns about pushing elk into sanctuary.
- Marc commented that most of our harvest was in the first couple days.

Waterfowl closure at McLean reservoir was discussed. Revisiting the landowners is the key.

Sage grouse translocation –

- We will be revisiting the sage grouse translocation to Alberta. It will require commission action as well. 40 were moved in 2011-12 and 38 hens in 2016. They were captured near lek sites. Alberta has done habitat improvements and have increased their numbers.
- Of the sage grouse moved in 2016, 48% mortality rate in the first year. There were 11 successful nests with 15 confirmed chicks. Year two had 17% mortality rate with 50% nest success and 6 confirmed chicks.
- *Ron Garwood* asked what the reason was for the mortality rate. Scott answered energy expended finding habitat as well as higher mortality rate of young hens and predation.
- We expect Alberta to request bird for 2018 and presently we have the numbers to support it. Canada feels that we did prevent a total loss of sage grouse in Canada. Mike Lang asked about the original proposal to send 40 in 16, 18 and 20. Commission only approved 2016 to revisit for 2018. One bird tried to return to MT. Rich Stuker commented that the reason they only approved the 2016 translocation was because of the concern with our populations at the time. Mike agreed that that was a good move.

Tyler asked about CWD. Currently 3 and 5 are the regions being sampled. R6 is only sampling road kill because they have been shown to have a higher percentage of CWD. Next year we are expecting to have more testing in our region. Currently if we see a symptomatic animal it will be tested.

Brian asked why we don't increase the numbers of elk permits for the breaks if we want to harvest more. Harvest rate may be higher if there are more tags but success rate would decrease because typically, as we increase the quotas, the success rates go down because the increase of hunters pushes the animals out of the area. Increasing because of the limited chance of drawing is a socially driven demand.

Rich advises that public recommendations and suggestions should go through the department but comments and even calls to the commissioners may cause them to reconsider something not recommended by the department.

Mike Lang requested definitions of non-active lek and active sage grouse leks. Scott led that discussion.

Enforcement Update- PR dollars/changes - Ron Howell

Dog training with wild birds

- We have been seeing dog trainers coming to our area with 20 horses and 100 dogs to train. The commission asked the department to look at the issue and find a solution. Other states regulate it. Canada doesn't allow it.
- FWP's proposal limits the number of dogs trained to 4 a day per person, party or group.
- FWP is seeking public comment on this issue and will hold a public meeting Oct 2 at the Glasgow HQ at 6pm. Oct 13 is the deadline to comment. The proposal is consistent with surrounding states.

Pittman Robertson dollars-legislative session

- In past sessions, there have been bills to limit warden enforcement authority. No bills were introduced for the 2017 session. PR funding for wardens was introduced in the budget committee.
- FWP uses PR federal grant funding for our Wildlife Division and that is great, but PR funding cannot be used for law enforcement. The bill funding proposal initially started with 50% of enforcement funding as PR. It ended up at 30%. Enforcement was already funded at 7%, so now they are 37% funded with PR dollars.
- Essentially what this actually means on the ground is we lost 3 full time game wardens in R6, because they are now doing Wildlife Management work instead of Enforcement work. Enforcement already has mandated hours for AIS and water safety. We will see how it plays out but this is how we are funded for the next couple years. Ron explained at Logan's request how they were required to track the hours.
- Hunters want to see the wardens on the ground. FWP has been told that Access is a priority. One of the selling points for our Block Management program is that landowners' property will be patrolled by wardens. Now wardens may not have the hours to fulfill all obligations.

Rich Stuker, FWP Commissioner, commented that, yes, hunters want to see the wardens on the ground, landowners want to see them even more. *Are PR hours being banked for use during the hunting season?* Yes, they are. We are trying to get as much PR hours in before the hunting season starts and our busiest time of year really gets going. The process is new to us and we are doing the best we can to work through this. We don't know what it looks like long term or all the effects it may have.

CAC Roundtable; public comments

Damien Austin

Birds look good, saw Elk on his way here today.

Scott Azure

At Fort Peck Reservation, things are pretty dry, bird numbers down. Hunting restricted to lots of walk in. Did add spring turkey. There is limited feed for bison so may have an increase in the drawings for buffalo hunt this year. Each year the tribe has a Tribal and Non-Tribal list for bison hunts.

No big fire activity.

Mark Azure

Experiencing drought like everyone. Discussed shutting down or limiting hunting season.

Weather permitting. Meeting tomorrow. Good antelope numbers. Wondering if with all the fires if these animals are being displaced. Wondering what will happen in Oct and Nov, we will wait and see.

Want to continue to build relationship with FWP and board. Also, we will have buffalo calves and yearlings to sell and may be able to help you out with a hunt. We will be pretty aggressive with live sales to maintain habitat for the remaining animals. Call for info. First come, first served, and there will probably be more bulls sold this year. We are planning to get new bulls from APR and Teddy Roosevelt.

Perri

Perri stated that if we get the rain predicted this week it will not change the fire situation.

There has been lots of assistance when there were fires this summer.

Archery camps are being set up around them and they have seen success already.

Number of animals are up, especially antelopes. Saw coyotes hunting antelopes this morning.

Prairie Dogs seem to be stabilizing.

Fire is the big concern.

Wondered if the hunter etiquette, landowner stewardship quiz has been brought up to date? Marc said it is in the works.

Action Item: Marc mentioned that he would put out a “hunter etiquette” press release again, with the suggestion by the Region 6 CAC. Marc will also update the group on the hunter etiquette program and/or landowner stewardship program as it is changed.

Perri extended an invitation to the 2nd Annual Phillips County Proud celebration hosted by the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance at the Tin Cup in Malta on Saturday the 16th. They will be honoring 100-year-old families.

Perri had a landowner (Bergsagels) ask whether elk can cross APR’s bison fence. She would like us to visit that landowner with an answer.

Action item: Scott will visit with Peggy Bergsagel about her question.

Brian Olson

Recently attended the St Marys group meeting. The number they use for the percentage of recreational use, from 2004, is much lower than our departments number. He suggested that we visit with the group regarding their numbers. *Cody* responded that he is not sure what they mean. As far as he knows, the group says that no one uses Fresno.

Action item: FWP re-engage in St. Mary working group regarding angler use on Fresno/Nelson.

Ron

Ron is concerned about the trout limit and would like to see it reduced to 1.

His BM property has a nice population of turkeys, but pheasant seem to be down. Whitetails are increasing and mule deer are stable. He has observed 2 sets of twins.

He feels the endangered species have gotten out of hand, but probably not much we can do.

The Valley County Conservation District, of which Ron is a board member, passed an initiative against the free ranging bison with 94% of voters in Valley County supporting it.

He wondered how hard the shocking of the trout is on them. *Steve* responded, not much impact at all.

Action item: Steve and or Tyler will address the rainbow trout population at the next meeting.

Dirk Monson

There are good numbers of pheasants in Dirks area.

He was glad to hear Scott talk about staying ahead of the deer populations. Populations currently seem more natural.

He has heard from several people that antelope in the south are hard to find.

Dirk appreciated being able to come into the office and review survey numbers with Drew and Scott.

Ken

The numbers of antelope are exploding. Numbers of hawks, eagles and gnats are also up. Birds and hawks run the river bottom.

No sign of EHD at this time.

He is catching few trout.

Ken helped with the NE MT fishing tour.

What happened to Come Home to Hunt? Marc noted that the program is still available, although it has gone through some changes. Marc and Kathy explained the differences between the “Come Home to Hunt” and the “Montana Native” application processes and cost.

Kelly

What is our relationship with outfitters? Mark answered that it is another interest group that we work with, with a commercial twist. We have no major issues or conflicts. Most outfitting is on private land.

All wardens have outfitters in their districts and we work with them. It is important to maintain a relationship. Steve added that compared to the rest of the regions we have a very low impact from outfitters on our fisheries.

Tyler

Antelope populations are up.

Sharp tailed grouse seem to be down.

Is it possible to develop a map showing the public roads? Ron responded that it would be a difficult task, especially for funding and now with PR restrictions. Ryan Linder is trying to check on roads in his area, one road at a time.

Aaron

Deer and Elk numbers are high in the southern part of county.

Elk have been seen a couple miles from Havre.

Archery hunters are having a hard time finding elk.

Jay Crandell

Mule deer are doing well, WT not as well. Lots of antelope.

Jay questioned why aren't there more antelope tags? He gets the question from non-locals. Scott responded that the district is large. Ag land areas are not surveyed. Management quotes are changed based on surveys north. We may have to look at that.

Lots of pheasants but concerned about them. 50,000 acres will be coming out of CRP this year. Waterholes are empty. He added a property in BM. He would also like to know where the legal roads are.

There are not as many bird hunters as in the past. The ones here seem to be very careful and are staying on the road and off the grass.

Nonresident hunter numbers are down more than likely because of the current conditions. Ryan stated that he gets lots of calls from the nonresident hunters about the drought. Scott stated that some groups relay the forecasts that they get from Ken and Ryan.

He observed one horse trainer with dogs on DNRC recently.

Rich Stuker

Dog issue should be a commission item.

Roads – could look at possibility of trading public road right-of-ways that were never developed (i.e. in a hayfield) for other developed private roads. In some counties, private roads were added to gas tax maps that should not be.

Bison Draft EIS has sat since 2014. Look at SB212, HB194. He thinks that the Final EIS may be released soon. Commission can't move forward until the EIS is released.

Don Kaveschan -Years ago, spotlighting deer was legal if you weren't shooting. *Is it still?* Ryan Linder responded that yes, it is, but may not be on the reservation. Cannot shoot from a county road. Light bar is illegal on road and even headlights can be considered spotlights is used inappropriately.

Rich-

If you hit a big horn sheep with a vehicle can you get a salvage permit? Ron responded, no.

Darlyne

Sage grouse and sharp-tail populations are doing quite well but they are hunting for water. Deer and antelope are drinking out of her stock tank.

Senator Lang

Mike thanked everyone for coming and protecting our resources.

He is on the sage grouse committee. If you have an issue, contact him. He publicly acknowledged and thanked R6 for meeting with him and educating him on sage grouse.

Shay

Addressed issues with the severity of the fires, firemen wore out. Severity classification has been approved for another month, but could shorten if the weather changes. There was a fire on 8th ridge. It burned 240 acres on BLM and about 1,000 acres on CMR. It will not be classified as controlled until Oct 6.

Tentative date for next meeting: January 18th.